

Address, Institute of World Affairs
Huntington-Sheraton, Pasadena
December 9, 1958

STAT

THE REAL STRATEGIC WEAPON:
AMERICAN-RUSSIAN EDUCATION COMPARED

Raymond B. Allen

To attempt to compare what is going on in American and Russian education during a period of evolution, experiment, and change is an impossible task within the limits of one paper. While much has been known about aspects of the Soviet system of education as it has evolved since the Bolshevik imposed Revolution of 1917, it is only during the past year or so that Americans generally have become interested in learning more about this important subject and coincidentally about our own education systems as well.

First, let us look at the origins and differing premises of the two systems. Ours is a decentralized set of systems of education, pluralistic and diverse in character, centered about the individuality and potentialities and freedom of choice of people. It has evolved over the generations since Jefferson emphasized the relation of education to freedom. His eloquent words set the stage for universal education.....

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be There is no safe deposit (for the functions of government) but with the people themselves, nor can they be safe with them without education."

Basic to our concept and control of education is the principle that the education systems shall be locally organized, managed and controlled and that no national plan or system of education shall be imposed by the Federal Government. Under this principle the nation has flourished and education has become universal with the Federal Government providing various kinds of assistance when needed without interfering with local management and control.

-2-

While I should like to discuss our systems of education systematically in comparison with the Soviet system, space will not permit. In any case, you are aware of its strengths and weaknesses and are as concerned as I am that contemporary American education be responsive to the needs and requirements of the opportunities and the challenge of our age of humanistic values, science, technology and industrial enterprise. I am sure, too, that you share my profound conviction that the challenge will be met without giving up our democratic principles because of any lack of confidence in our way of solving problems on a voluntary local action basis. Should we attempt to do otherwise, we will lose our greatest source of strength and security as a nation.

Democratic action takes time and is sometimes wasteful. On the other hand, a dictatorship, once a course of action is determined upon, can move promptly to make changes considered desirable. Ours is a slower but surer system of achieving progress which will endure. But the pace of change must be accelerated. Because there are all powerful central agencies of decision making and control in the USSR, we should not assume that the Soviet leaders do not take advantage of what we have learned and do not adopt methods and systems of the West which serve their purposes. By this time most thinking Americans are aware, for example, that the American free enterprise invention of graduated monetary incentives and rewards is in full play throughout the Soviet educational system, as in other sectors of the Soviet economy and culture. As a matter of fact, they have added a few pages of their own to this chapter of our free enterprise book. And today they are studying every facet of American education systems.

Would it not be the supreme irony of history if the Soviets should win their war to dominate the world through the use of the free enterprise weapons which we have fashioned?

I suggest, therefore, that we should continue our study of what is going on in Russia, not because we lack confidence in American education, but because in

any competition the competitor who knows his adversary the best, his strengths as well as his weaknesses and vulnerabilities, is the likely winner. Moreover, it may well be that some aspects of education of the youth of Russia (its future leaders) may be our most effective secret strategic weapon to effect a change in the nature and characteristics of the dictatorship of the Communist party over the Russian people. (Djilas' New Class in a so-called classless society.)

Now may I speak in a summary fashion of the education system in the USSR. The Soviet system is a universal one also, but its main lines of development and most of the details of management and curriculum are determined by the Communist Party and its operational arm, the Soviet Government, through the Ministries of Education and of Higher Education.

The premises and principles for all Soviet education were laid down by Lenin in the following significant statements:

"without the apparatus of government power, without material and financial assistance, it is impossible to expand education."¹ (Feb. 25, 1920).... "the entire organization of education, not only in the realm of political enlightenment in general, but especially in the realm of art, must be permeated with the spirit of the proletarian class struggle... for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for the abolishment of classes, for the elimination of all exploitation of man by man."² (Oct., 1920).... "as long as there is such a thing as illiteracy in our country, one cannot even speak of political enlightenment."³ (Oct. 17, 1921).... "The army of teachers must set itself gigantic tasks of enlightenment and above all must become the chief force of socialist enlightenment...One cannot restrict oneself to the bounds of narrow teaching activity. The teachers must merge with the entire battling mass of workers. The task of the new pedagogy is to bind teaching to the task of the socialist organization of society."⁴ (June 5, 1918).... "the teacher must be placed on a higher level than ever before...We must work systematically, unswervingly, persistently at his spiritual development, his preparation for his truly high calling, and most important of all, at improving his material situation."⁵ (Pravda, Jan. 4, 1923).... "Cost what it may, we must set our goal for the renewal of our government apparatus: in the first place, learn, in the second place, learn, and in the third place, learn."⁶ (Pravda, Mar. 4, 1923.)

Now let us see what Soviet education looks like 40 years after Lenin wrote these words.

- (1) Lenin o narodnom obrazovanii..Stat'i reci, Moskva, 1957
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) Ibid.

A distinguished delegation of American educators recently reported on higher education in the Soviet Union today stating,

"It is our observation that all basic objectives and the nature of the pattern of higher education, as every other phase of Soviet life, are determined centrally for the nation by the Party and do not necessarily reflect the thought and wishes of the faculties or administrations of the separate institutions. The educational system is as sharply divided as the society is divided between the governors and the governed."¹

They reported further that the Russians

"believe that after work experience students are more mature, and therefore more able to profit from the education they are given. In the second place, they believe that both a humility and a sense of reality result from work and so the student emerges as a better balanced individual"² and "higher education is viewed by the State as the principal method of channeling the abilities of the nation. It is regarded by the individual as indispensable to significant achievement in society."³

It is clear from this report and others that education in Russia has great prestige value and that learning is recognized as essential to advancement and progress. The incentives and rewards for educational achievement in the fields of the sciences, as well as in the arts, are very great indeed. A climate has been created of appreciation of the teacher, the scholar, scientist and artist, and this doubtless accounts, at least in part, for the remarkable advance of Soviet Russia in a generation from a society which was largely agrarian and illiterate to a position of great scientific, technological, industrial and cultural strength.

In America, the incentives and rewards of the educated man are very great also, but the fact that there is an increasing shortage of qualified teachers in our educational system at every level indicates that the competition within

- (1) Report on Higher Education in the Soviet Union, Univ. of Pittsburg Press, 1958, pps. 4, 15
- (2) Ibid., p. 18
- (3) Ibid., p. 15

our society for trained brainpower is such that our schools are having difficulty in attracting and holding qualified people.

By contrast, in Russia there is keen competition for appointments to universities, technical institutes and other schools as well. In industry, on the other hand, there are shortages of skilled workers and technicians. It would appear then that the need for skilled workmen in the Russian industrial system may be one reason at least for the beginning reorganization of the educational system of the Soviet Republics.

To identify, therefore, the main currents and trends of education and training in Russia and America we must look to the nature of the contemporary industrial society. Whatever the political governmental forms may be, industrial establishments appear to have their own internal logic and their own needs and requirements, and among these significantly are trained brainpower and skilled hands.

Before the 1917 Revolution, Russian education was for the elite and the population was largely illiterate. Between 1917 and 1930, Russian education institutions expanded rapidly and included some experimentation, but the emphasis everywhere was on solid intellectual discipline. By 1930 the Soviets decided to establish a firm central government management which determined the curricula at all levels and set the state examinations for the lower schools. The higher institutions had more latitude and determined to some extent the nature of their programs which were based largely on the European programs of specialized higher education disciplines. (We should note that general education in languages, literature, mathematics and science was completed in the lower schools.) Specialization began with admission to the higher institutions and students were channeled into disciplines and professions according to the manpower needs as laid down by the successive 5 year economic plans for the industrialization of the nation.

In the economic and industrial sector, regional decentralization of economic control was affected some two years ago by action of the Presidium; but it was clearly Khrushchev's decision which forced this historic change. Now there are some 106 regional economic councils managing 200,000 separate enterprises. The economic and industrial goals, however, are still set by the central planning agencies (Gosplan). The recently announced seven year plan establishes the goals for the country as a whole which the regional councils are required to implement.

In order to meet these goals, the planners have to estimate the manpower requirements; and it is at this point that the reorganization of the educational system appears to have become necessary.

Addressing the 13th Congress of the Young Communist League (YCL) in Moscow on April 18 of this year,¹ Chairman Khrushchev announced his view of the role of youth and of their education in the future in a significant statement of policy. It is of more than passing significance that throughout this paper he stressed the individual and individual initiative almost to the point of appearing to change the doctrine of everything for the State to something for the individual. He says, for example, that:

"Our YCL is large. It consists of 18 million young men and women. This is good, but it does not mean that people can be counted by the hundreds and thousands and the individual forgotten. Attention to each young person, concern for his growth and work, studies and cultural development should underlie all the YCL's work."

"Working people must have off-hour opportunities to study the arts, painting, music and the humanities. The State and YCL must assist these people."

"The individual must be helped by common efforts to overcome the difficulties and adversities of life; it is necessary to see to it that he does not stop in his development or become covered with the mold of philistinism."

"It is a very good thing when the fresh breeze of life blows upon a person."

(1) The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Published by Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, June 4, 1958

Khrushchev says that youth

"do not need the bureaucratic forms to originate ideas and it is wrong to reduce matters to routing everything through state agencies. What kind of initiative is it (he asks) when there are guides everywhere in the form of paid instructors, propagandists, physical culture inspectors and other officials"?

"Time has come for decisive reorganization. Russia must set forth the precept, sacred to all members of society. The young must be indoctrinated with the idea of being useful to society."

Then he discusses the middle, i.e., secondary schools. He complains that they have been preparing students merely for higher educational schools and if students are not accepted they are dissatisfied and do not want to go into factories or farms. He wonders how best to employ these students who are "ignorant of life." He suggests that higher educational schools must be improved to bring students closer to production; the reorganization of secondary schools will aid this endeavor. He suggests factory vocational schools. He feels that their higher educational institutions should admit a larger number of young people who already have had some experience and a record of practical work. He feels that a broader development of initiative among the young is needed at the present time. Khrushchev also said that influential parents get students into higher educational schools, contradicting the very essence of Russian socialist system. (Sometime later, Izvestia reported in an article entitled, "By the Back Door," that there was bribe-taking and that five guilty parties are being held criminally liable and they have been expelled from the party.)

In his concluding remarks, Khrushchev exhorts the Congress by saying that "we must overtake the USA, the most highly developed capitalist country in the world in per capita output." Then follows the international Communist line that it is the noble duty of the YCL to train Soviet young people in proletarian internationalism, in strengthening and broadening fraternal ties with the young people in the socialist countries with all young people in the world who are fighting for peace and democracy on our planet.

-8-

This is a remarkable statement, not only because it differs from the usual Communist line, but also because unlike those of Stalin, and other Bolsheviks, it introduces the concept of a pragmatic approach to the educational, industrial, cultural and individual problems of the Russian people. Khrushchev obviously courts the favor of the young by admitting that they have problems which the bureaucracy can't solve and by urging them to get busy and solve them by their own initiative.

Khrushchev's speech was reflected 6 weeks later in The New Regulations for Admission to Higher Educational Institutions, published in Pravda on June 4 as follows:

"Up to 80% of the openings in the admissions plan of a given higher educational institution will be assigned to persons entitled to admission on a non-competitive or a preferential basis. (But presumably by examination, nevertheless.) At least 20% of the openings will be reserved for young people who have just completed their secondary specialized or general education."

"For greater objectivity in evaluating examinations, the new regulations provide for entrance examinations in each subject to be conducted by commissions composed of at least two examiners appointed by the director of the higher educational institutions."

"Included in the commissions that decide on student admissions will be representatives of city Party, trade union and YCL organizations in cities... and of borough Party, trade union and YCL organizations in large cities."

An interesting article by a Soviet teacher, published in Izvestia June 7, makes this observation:

"Soviet schools must bring up the complete man... the man capable of both physical and mental labor, of creative work and inspiration, the man with a rounded education and lofty moral principles. We must help our graduate to become such a man. The new, reorganized Soviet schools will be able to cope with this problem."

Another article in Izvestia of June 18 states that:

"the eight year school (replacing the 10 year schools) must solve the problem of technological training as well as provide for the moral, esthetic and physical development of the student. The school system must keep parents informed...a program that takes into account age differences and levels of education and the goals of each year of training."

The article goes on to suggest that a pedagogical congress should be convened to discuss all the aspects of the acute problems of the system of public education, with representatives of the general public participating in the congress.

Such a conference was held in Moscow for the Russian Republic - convened by the Ministry of Education. Among those attending were administrative personnel in public education, Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Autonomous Republics and of executive committees of the Provinces and territory Soviets, secretaries and department heads of province and territory committees, scholars of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and chairmen of provinces, etc. They discussed problems of the reorganization of schools as proposed in Khrushchev's speech of April 18.

Following the 8 year schools (replacing the 10 year schools) which carry the student from age 8 to age 16 or 17, there will be several types of schools (besides universities and institutes) for those who are qualified. These are vocational and technical schools with 3 or 4 year curricula which prepare students for agriculture, industry and economic planning; trade, theater, music, arts, military and labor reserve schools; and factory trade schools (one year) and technical schools (two years) also attached to factories.

As nearly as can be determined now, this does not mean that the universities and specialized institutes will be less important. It appears to mean that the competitive conditions for entrance will be changed and that more students will be eligible for examination to enter such institutions and may enter universities and institutes after various periods of work experience and technical instruction.

Parenthetically, may I point out here that one of the more serious problems facing American education is the manpower shortage of technically and vocationally oriented people for the semi-skilled and skilled jobs in our industrial

plants. The Department of Labor estimates that this part of the labor force needs to be expanded by 23% by 1965.

Incidentally, this need is recognized in the U. S. Defense Education Act which provides under Title VIII for increased Federal assistance to the States in training individuals for employment as highly skilled technicians in occupations requiring scientific knowledge in fields necessary for the national defense. Our junior colleges and high schools are under increasing pressure to expand such programs.

Alfred North Whitehead struck the right balance between technical and liberal education when he wrote:

"There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical: that is no education which does not impart both technique and intellectual vision."... "A technical or technological education, which is to have any chance of satisfying the practical needs of the nation, must be conceived in a liberal spirit as a real intellectual enlightenment in regard to principles applied and services rendered. In such an education geometry and poetry are as essential as turning laths."

Returning now to Soviet education, it would appear from this cursory analysis of the changes going on and being contemplated that the Russians are learning from our experience and now recognize the disadvantages of a too rigid system of education.

On our part, we are re-examining curricula throughout our entire school system to determine whether we have allowed too much freedom of choice among courses with inadequate attention to basic education in the fields of languages, mathematics and science. We should never forget that mathematics and science teaching in Russia as elsewhere are liberal and liberating disciplines in that they are concerned with asking questions of nature, and such questions have to be framed in an experimental design involving creative imagination and concepts of great complexity. The scientist and mathematician seek to determine the actions and reactions of the atom, of man, the planet, the solar system...the

-11-

galaxy of which we are a part, and the totality of the universe. From such answers come enlightenment and the wisdom that will make life more rewarding to all.

Without neglecting the continuing need for vocational and technical instruction, we are wondering too whether we have permitted ourselves the luxury of too much freedom of choice among our teenagers before they have the education and self discipline necessary to make wise choices of courses of study. Is it really wise in an age of science to give youth the freedom to choose - to be ignorant of science, of mathematics beyond arithmetic, and of any foreign languages? Can we afford the lack of discipline in the young reflected in bad manners, slovenly personal habits, disrespect of teachers and parents, inaccuracy in the use of their mother tongue, disorderliness and other evidences of lack of self discipline which are all too common in some class rooms? Let us not confuse freedom to be ill mannered and ignorant with freedom to be an educated self disciplined American.

The ferment in education in both countries and throughout the world generally is a clear indication of the fact that governments and people are aware that the competitive struggles of today are going to be won by those who are prepared for the future, with trained minds and hands. These are decisive weapons.

One cannot but admire the foresight and insight of Alexis de Tocqueville when he wrote over 100 years ago in his book, "Democracy in America,"...

"There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend toward the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans...The American struggles against the obstacles that nature opposes him; the adversaries of the Russian are men. The former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its arms. The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm.

-12-

The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe."

But, time has brought changes and one would wonder how de Tocqueville would analyze the present scene when he sees that while the Soviets are still combating unexplored wildernesses of their vast country, they have in the past forty years built the foundations and part of the superstructure of a technological and industrial society, using education and training as their principal tools. We, on our side have largely exhausted the exploration of our wilderness and natural resources and are in a more favorable position to explore the frontiers of science and the arts, and to assist other peoples to develop their latent human and material resources. But, in this sector also, the Soviets are busy and creative. The outcome of the competitions in the decades to come will be decided by the planning, resources, and energy we put into the educational and training job.

Estimates of the proportion of the national income and product of the two countries which go into this strategic sector of the East-West struggle vary, but conservative economists have estimated that the Soviets are investing about twice as much per capita as we are in education and training. We need to accelerate our efforts to improve the quantity, quality and efficiency of the education enterprise.

The decisive and real strategic factor is the individual human being himself, his natural desire to talk freely, write freely and express himself as he chooses. Boris Pasternak put it in these eloquent words:

"What has for centuries raised man above the beast is not the cudgel but an inward music: the irresistible power of unarmed truth."

The intellectual in Russia has always been a force the government has had to reckon with, be it the Tsars or the Bolsheviks. We should not forget that

-13-

the Communist dialectic and dictatorship was an idea and creation of Europeans and that this was imposed on the Russian people from outside. True, they had their revolutionary freedom seeking movements and a genuine revolution would have doubtless succeeded in time had not the German general staff permitted Lenin and his party to go to Russia during World War I where he successfully launched his counter-revolution and established the Communist dictatorship over the Russian people.

Working on our side within Russia itself are thousands, indeed millions of people, who with Pasternak, believe that "only individuals seek the truth." This is our real strategic strength and weapon - the individual human being - literate, thinking, unafraid.

The Russian people have never known freedom as we know it and understand it. Inevitably, therefore, they have had to find ways and means of keeping alive and conforming to the requirements of living by subjugating their dissatisfaction with their governors. We need only read Dudintsev's Not by Bread Alone, and Pasternak's Dr. Zhivago, and witness their artistic expressions to know that the Bolsheviki can never change human nature in any fundamental way.

The nature of the requirements, needs and demands of a scientific, industrial and technological society, the nature of human nature and creativity, the liberating force of education, the power of increasing communications and public opinion among all peoples are strategic weapons to achieve over time enduring changes in the nature and characteristics and methods of the Communist dictatorship.

Let us not expect a violent revolution within Russia, for this will not come, but with the increasing affluence of the Russian people, the true revolutionary spirit of freedom, and not the counter-revolution of Communism, will grow and gather strength.

Let us never forget that without the strength of the military shield we are forging in the free world the struggle would have been lost already. Behind

-14-

this shield we must win the most decisive of all contemporary struggles. This is the struggle to assure self-determination and freedom in the less developed and uncommitted countries of Asia and Africa. Perhaps most decisive is what is happening in Red China, where one-fourth of the inhabitants of this planet are living and working to educate and industrialize themselves. But here, too, are centuries old traditions of individuality, and this country, too, is not immune to the processes of change which industrialization and education will bring.

I conclude with the eloquent words of Alfred North Whitehead:

"Mankind is now in one of its rare moods of shifting its outlook. The mere compulsion of tradition has lost its force. It is the business of philosophers, students and practical men to re-create and re-enact a vision of the world, conservative and radical, including those elements of reverence and order without which society lapses into riot, a vision penetrated through and through with unflinching rationality."